

Again, even the imperialists acknowledge that the Maoist strategy is still, above all others past and present, very relevant, very much alive, and the most revolutionary, political, and threatening to their class, because it appeals to and mobilizes *the entire population* (how's that for "marginal" against a common class enemy.

On the Vanguard Party, Once Again



by
Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

study and analysis.

How many of us, because of being controlled by external forces and/or not thinking beyond reflex, emotion, impulse, prejudice, and rhetoric, cause ourselves pain, injury, and even death, or readily attack and destroy others for little or nothing? This is because at the class, national, and individual levels, we lack a healthy CNS (mass-based leadership) that genuinely and organically recognizes and serves our bosom interests.

Just as a centralized leadership is needed in the communal village to organize and “keep the unity of the people,” so too do we as vastly larger and more complex oppressed classes and nationalities need the same. Only the MLM party structure has *proven* able to do this.

You can have an anarchist bookstore or bakery, and be quite successful. But we’re not talking about something so localized, simple, and basic. We’re talking about overthrowing the monopoly capitalist ruling class and transforming the political economy and social relations of the whole world to end all oppression and exploitation. This is not so simple and cannot be done in an anarchistic fashion. Taken together, these are the reasons I promote the MLM style party leadership.

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!

All Power to the People!

For example when Dulles heard about our report he said he wanted to see it. Within a couple of weeks he had come up with a conclusion: China was bad through and through; the Soviet Union was a little better. But the Soviet Union couldn't see it, and sent us a memorandum because they feared we were moving to the right. When the Anti-rightist movement started, naturally our 'liberalization' vanished.

"In short, our basic line is universal truth, but details differ. This applies to each country and to each province. There is unity and there are also contradictions. The Soviet Union stressed unity, but doesn't talk about contradictions, especially the contradictions between the leaders and the led."

On the latter point Mao was criticizing Stalin for deviating from the principles of DC and the "Mass Line Method" in the practice of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. An error which led to the alienation of the party from its mass base, the regeneration and concentration of aspiring bourgeois elements within the upper ranks of the party and state of the USSR, and a capitalist clique seizing power upon Stalin's death. Unlike Mao, Stalin had not come to terms with the reality that class struggle continues even under socialism, and within the revolutionary party itself. So it's clear Mao's party line was not "subservient to Moscow."

Without a Head the Body Will Fall

A revolutionary mass struggle needs an MLM party style leadership, like the body needs a healthy central nervous system. The masses without their own revolutionary party is like a body without a healthy CNS, in that they only react spontaneously (reflexively) to their pain and discomfort and look to outside forces to think for them and control their choices and actions. They can't effectively unite, organize, and coordinate their activities or even be conscious of themselves as a common organism (class), nor intelligently analyze, judge, and solve their problems, especially more complex ones that require deeper

The following is from an interview by correspondence with Comrade Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, the Minister of Defense of the New Afrikan Black Panther Party—Prison Chapter (NABPP-PC), conducted by anarchist Comrade Anthony Rayson of the South Chicago ABC Zine Distro.

Anthony Rayson: You've expressed admiration for Hamas, the revolutionary Palestinian group. They've managed to build popular support and established social/survival programs, even under horrific conditions of occupation—extreme violence, poverty, etc.—yet they are not an explicitly Marxist-Leninist group, but rather a national liberation organization, with a strong religious (Muslim) component. These popular organizations have come in many flavors, including Communist and anarchist. Why do you believe so strongly in the traditional Leninist model (Vanguard Party/Democratic Centralism, etc.) in this uniquely racist, consumerist, extreme capitalist country, with such a moribund, marginalized, and subservient (to Moscow) Marxist tradition?

Rashid: Why in today's struggle do I promote the need for a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (MLM) style party leadership? This is a question asked often of and by many avowed Communists, which many can't answer. Many also reject the 'Vanguard' party concept as you do because it's been frequently misapplied and misunderstood. But to me, the answer seems pretty simple—common sense really—once you get past rhetoric and stereotypes, and face the concrete realities and needs of revolutionary struggle. I'll begin with this question, then move on to your other points.

Why the Vanguard Party?

Once you understand that class lies at the center of any genuine struggle against capitalism, namely the struggle between the working class (proletariat) and the capitalist class (bourgeoisie), then it becomes clear that there's a need to awaken the consciousness of workers (as a common class) to the fact and cause of their exploitation and oppression, and the criminal rule of the bourgeoisie. Also, the working

class needs to be united and organized to challenge their oppression. Furthermore they need to understand that overcoming their exploitation compels coordinated struggle on many fronts, beyond merely seeking better wages/work conditions, job security/benefits, etc., which is the typical extent of what workers struggle for when left to their own spontaneous activism. They must realize that it is a broad political struggle, and the bourgeoisie oppresses many sectors other than just the working class. To accomplish this, and uniting them with other oppressed sectors against the bourgeoisie, requires a proletarian-based leadership structure.

But the critical problem which opponents of the vanguard party have never answered in over 100 years of debate is the theoretical and practical question of how to unify the broad and fragmented working class into a united movement wherein it is *conscious of itself (and its interests) as a class*. Only genuine ML and MLM parties have solved this problem, and been able to awaken and maintain working-class consciousness and unity, and on a level of struggle higher than mere trade union politics (what Lenin called “economism”).

Many on the ‘Left,’ (including anarchists and avowed Communists) because they *can’t* resolve this problem, avoid, downplay, distort, or have altogether abandoned the question of class struggle and its central role in any genuine anti-capitalist revolutionary movement, or they otherwise endlessly speculate how working-class success might be achieved.

Karl Marx expressed early on that capitalism could be destroyed and a free and equal society ultimately achieved, only by the proletariat first overthrowing the bourgeois class, and then exercising its own (economic, political, military, and cultural) dictatorship over the bourgeoisie. Failure to suppress the bourgeoisie after its power was overthrown would only result in its regaining state power. This he witnessed first hand.

Because proletarian struggle was only in its infant stages during his day, Marx was unable to answer *how* it could effectively defeat and

applied only in relation to the specific conditions of a particular country and only by an organization that has developed out of indigenous forces and is not totally dependent upon external or foreign aid for its existence.”

They went on to point out:

“Until the Black revolutionary movement is ready to take seriously the scientific approach to revolution developed by Marx, Lenin, Ho, and Giap, it will still be depending upon mystical or external guidance to achieve the power which can only be achieved by the most rigorous scientific appraisal of social forces. Mao, Ho, and Cabral did not reject the necessity for a scientific approach to revolution because the founders of the approach were white. They used the method of Marx and Lenin, being careful at the same time to distinguish between the specific conditions of their own countries and those of Europe and Russia.”

Not only were the various revolutionary movements under ML style parties also not “subservient to Moscow” in the sense of trying to duplicate what occurred in Russia in their own countries, but, although he upheld Stalin’s achievements while criticizing his errors, Mao explicitly refused to allow the Soviet Union and Stalin to direct the struggle in China. I’ll let Mao tell you about it:

“The Chinese revolution won victory by acting contrary to Stalin’s will... During the quarrel with Wang Ming from 1937 to August 1938, we put forward ten great policies; while Wang Ming produced sixty policies. If we had followed Wang Ming’s, or in other words Stalin’s, methods the Chinese revolution couldn’t have succeeded. When our revolution succeeded, Stalin said it was a fake. We did not argue with him, and as soon as we fought the war to resist America and aid Korea, our revolution became a genuine one [in his eyes]. But when we brought out ‘On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People’ we talked about this question but they didn’t. And what’s more they said we were going in for liberalism, so it seems we were not genuine again. When this report of ours was published, the New York Times printed it complete, and also carried an article which claimed that China was being ‘liberalized.’ It is quite natural for the bourgeoisie to clutch at straws when drowning. But bourgeois politicians are not altogether without discernment.

And we’re talking about a party that united, organized, and led a nation of multiple distinct nationalities and ‘races’ of people, that composed fully 1/5 of the world’s entire population. Mao was fond of pointing out that China was so vast that when the sun was setting on the western border of China, it was rising on the eastern border. Is *that* marginal?!

Subservient to Moscow?

As for MLM Parties being “subservient to Moscow,” because the concept was first developed by Lenin in Russia; that sounds a lot like the rhetoric of cultural nationalists and subjective reverse racists who reject the vanguard party concept because Lenin was “white.” James and Grace Lee Boggs long ago answered such arguments:

“In the United States, as the Black movement struggles to define its goals and true means to achieve them, the question of what constitutes a Black revolutionary party is going to become increasingly the center discussion and controversy. In order for this discussion and controversy to be meaningful, the Black movement will have to make a serious study of the concept of the vanguard party as developed and practiced by its originator. To believe that the Black revolutionary movement can evade such a study because Lenin was white and a European would be just as ridiculous as for an African freedom fighter to forego to fly an airplane because the Wright brothers were white Americans. Blacks don’t refuse to drive Cadillacs because they are made by General Motors or to watch television because Philco (Ford) manufactures TV sets. What has been achieved in human history, whether technological or political, Blacks have a right to inherit. The very high development of the theory and practice of the vanguard party as originated by Lenin in Russia, and subsequently developed by Mao and Ho in Asia and Amílcar Cabral in Africa, belongs to all oppressed people of the world, providing those who seek to end the domination of man by man with guidelines which they ignore at their peril. It must be borne in mind at the same time that these guidelines can be

exercise its dictatorship over the bourgeoisie. But his studies of those early workers’ struggles, specifically the Paris Commune of 1871, gave him some ideas on the methods that the workers were in the *process* of discovering. He did recognize, although he supported the commune as a heroic effort, that it could not successfully hold onto its power because the French proletariat was not yet sufficiently class conscious, united, and organized.

Subsequently, Lenin, who analyzed and actively participated in the day-to-day fight against the even more advanced, consolidated, and powerful capitalist system (monopoly capitalism or imperialism) of his era, furthered Marx’s analyses and was able to devise and apply a definite organizational form and tactics with which to unite and organize the proletarian struggle. He realized that a disciplined party, committed explicitly to the interests and philosophy of the working class, was needed to awaken the proletariat on a nationwide scale to their common class identity and interests, to unite and organize them upon this common class stand against and to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and to hold onto that power and repress the bourgeoisie.

And his method—the ML party—above all others, worked. In fact, it achieved the first working-class socialist state (in Russia in 1917), which doesn’t discount the fact that in the process many mistakes were made alongside the achievements. And errors were to be expected, since it was the first successful struggle of its type, and met with determined resistance from the capitalist class in Russia and the major imperialist powers, all of whom promptly invaded Russia attempting to overthrow the new socialist state.

Unlike much of today’s academic and petty-bourgeois ‘Left,’ Lenin and company did not refuse to take the lead for fear of failure or a fight, nor get bogged down in moral dithering. Instead they stoutly took the lead, defied and endured the severest state repression, applied theory to practice, refined their tactics, and gave the world and those to follow an invaluable standard of leadership and struggle to learn from and build upon.

In China, Mao Zedong, studying and observing Marx’s, Lenin’s, and

Russia's examples, further advanced the ML party concept, and adapted it to his own people's struggles against multiple advanced imperialist powers and the internal class enemies of the Chinese masses. From this experience Mao discovered that even after a proletarian revolution succeeds in defeating the bourgeoisie and achieving a socialist society, the class struggle continues—often in forms more complicated than the initial struggle to overthrow capitalist state power. This because, although overthrown, the bourgeoisie and its influences still exist within the new society, and they will struggle *unceasingly* to regain power. To combat this tendency he found that a series of revolutions in culture had to be waged to wipe out bourgeois influences and values, and that class struggle had to continue especially *within the vanguard party* itself and upper levels of the socialist state, to keep the party loyal to the proletariat and ensure it wasn't subverted by aspiring and regenerated bourgeois elements into their own vanguard. This required giving the masses greater oversight and control over the party and state, and active power to combat bureaucratic degeneration. He thus enhanced party democracy.

But in any event, the party structure is indispensable. The key issue is what class's interests it serves and is loyal to. It's ironic that many people ask why the working class—which is infinitely larger and thus more difficult to organize than the bourgeoisie—(or oppressed nationalities of people) needs a leading party to unite and organize it in struggle against the imperialist class and system. Yet no one *ever* questions—nor even recognizes—that the capitalist class also has and needs its own political organizations to successfully exercise and organize *its own* unity and dictatorship over the working class and everyone else. Lest we forget, bourgeois political structures and leaders preceded, and led, every movement where capitalism and imperialism overthrew feudal, slave-owning, etc. political economies (especially here in amerika... what indeed were the Whigs, Democrats, Republicans, Tories, etc. but parties of the existing or aspiring ruling classes?). And it is these parties that rule in capitalist societies in the interests of the bourgeoisie.

In case you didn't notice, it's the wealthy minority who the entire political system and its parties serve in capitalist society, and it's *against*

that strategy, led by an MLM party, in its Army Field Manual #100-20:

“People's War is the invention of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party. Although the era of Communist-sponsored wars of national liberation has apparently ended, any serious insurgent would be advised to consider carefully the effectiveness of People's War, the most political of all insurgent strategies. The Maoist or Mass Strategy attempts to mobilize a whole people against their government. The most sophisticated of insurgent strategies, it emphasized organization and its relationship with the entire population. It is also the most military in its latter stages as it attempts to raise an army within the affected country and to challenge the government on the field of battle. The Maoist mass strategy has many imitators. The Vietnamese Communists used it to great effect, and it has been emulated in Peru, the Philippines, and elsewhere. Thus the mass strategy deserves special attention.”

It was Mao who made clear that the MLM party's leadership was the key to waging any successful revolutionary mass struggle, including the one he successfully led in China.

“A well-disciplined Party armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism, using the method of self-criticism and linked with the masses of people; an army under the leadership of such a party; a united front of all revolutionary classes and all revolutionary groups under the leadership of such a party—these are the three main weapons with which we have defeated the enemy.”

“If there is to be a revolution, there must be a revolutionary party. Without a revolutionary party, without a party built on the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary style, it is impossible to lead the working class and the broad masses of people in defeating imperialism and its running dogs.”

And as I pointed out elsewhere:

“Mao's vanguard party walked its talk. Not only did it repel a Japanese imperialist invasion, defeat the imperialist-backed KMT army and seize power in 1949, empowering and improving the living conditions of China's millions, but with a peasant army—and fresh from a civil war—it repelled the world's most powerful combined military forces, the u.s. and UN, from its borders in

largest recipient of u.s. financial and military aid, the FARC-EP, an ML party, has won broad popular support and is holding its own against the Colombian military and multitudes of u.s. and Colombian government-backed death squads.

Somehow you seem to overlook that today there are millions being led in active resistance against imperialism by ML and MLM parties, and billions supporting or influenced by such struggles. *That's a large portion* of the world's population being led by such parties. To call such a vast number of people “marginal” smacks of imperialist country chauvinism, since most of these numbers are in the Third World, and I can't find anything that anti-authoritarians have contributed to their livelihoods and struggles.

Indeed, contrast this all with the fact that the last *and only* revolutionary victory that anarchists claim responsibility for (and that was with communist help that they turned on) was in Spain, way back in 1936. And that was localized and very brief—lasting only a few months—and furthermore paved the way for Francisco Franco's decades-long fascist dictatorship. Whereas in the former Soviet Union and China, it took decades to dismantle socialism and reinstate capitalism after their revolutions.

With only one revolutionary victory to its name occurring almost a century ago, and being a small counter-cultural trend among white middle-class folks and youth, what would you call anarchism if not “moribund” and “marginalized”?

Again, even the imperialists acknowledge that the Maoist strategy is still, above all others past and present, very relevant, very much alive, and the most revolutionary, political and threatening to their class, because it appeals to and mobilizes *the entire population* (how's that for “marginal”) against a common class enemy. Meaning it provides a class-conscious leadership that remains true to its base. At West Point, the u.s. Army's “distinguished” war college, Mao's works are mandatory study, and they still admit inability to contend with the Maoist strategy. Similarly here's what the imperialist hired guns, the u.s. Army, says of

the working class, poor, and other marginalized groups that their laws, courts, police, military, prisons, etc. exert control. *This* is why you have no genuine ML parties (I should say MLM parties) operating legally in any capitalist country.

The bourgeoisie *everywhere* is *very* class conscious; and remains vigilant in keeping the workers atomized; divided against each other along racial, gender, national, religious, and other lines; and focused on immediate individual survival needs.

To counter this, to awaken, unite, organize and coordinate the proletariat *as a common class* against bourgeois rule, requires a leading organization that is totally committed in theory and practice to, and is rooted in, the working class. *This* is what the MLM revolutionary vanguard party is all about and why it's needed.

What is a Vanguard?

Since we both use the term to refer to the MLM party, and because in many circles the term has taken on a distorted meaning equivalent to a four-letter word, I want to comment on what a “vanguard” actually is.

As any dictionary will tell you, vanguard simply means ‘leadership,’ whether of a class, society, army, movement, or opinion. Essentially it is an advanced sector or group that unites, informs, organizes, and guides a larger sector or group. Just like the Central Nervous System (CNS) unites, informs, organizes, and guides the activities of the body's organs and major muscle groups, while it also remains an organic part of and draws information from the very body it serves. Only when the vanguard or leadership is unhealthy or represents the interests of a body other than the one it directs, does it become an oppressive thing. *Keep this in mind.*

Societies, movements, armies, etc. are complex social structures that

require a centralized leadership to unite, coordinate, draw practical lessons from, organize, and guide them. In fact there has *never* existed a society without a centralized leadership, whether you're looking at communal pre-state band or village, or slave-owning, or state level feudal or capitalist societies, they all had a centralized leading body: from clan mothers and head matrons, to big men, head men, chiefs, and elders' councils, from monarchs to political parties with legislative, executive, and judicial branches or a combination of these.

Even esteemed anarchists like Noam Chomsky agree that it's impossible to organize a society without leaders. Again, the key question turns on *whose* interests the leaders serve. Are they leaders who exist as an organic part of the society and movement they lead, or are they representatives of a small specialized group that aims to impose its own will and values upon everyone else? (Whether by force, fraud, or otherwise). And in *all* cases of leadership, a combination of democracy and centralism is used. The question is whether it is democracy exercised by and among the masses and their genuine leadership, or by and among a select minority acting *against* the masses. Which brings me to the concept of Democratic Centralism (DC), which you imply is something unique to MLM parties.

On Criticism and DC

Let's look at communal pre-colonial Afrikan villages for example, which many anti-authoritarians and anti-'vanguardists' hail as genuine models of social equality and democracy. It may be relevant to point out to some of our readers that many Afrikans kidnapped and brought to the amerikas in chains came from such societies. Consequently, many of the escaped slave societies here in the western hemisphere, known as the Maroons, modeled their more egalitarian societies after those pre-colonial communal villages.

In those Afrikan societies there existed a very centralized authority

become national liberation groups to a greater or lesser degree.

Now I *can't* agree that there are or have been any popular based anarchist organizations. Actually that's a sort of oxymoron. I've never heard of nor seen anarchists 'organize' and coordinate anyone other than a handful of people, and certainly not in any sort of organized leadership structure.

Which is not to invalidate the invaluable help and support that quite a few anarchists, especially the ABCs (Anarchist Black Cross) have given to oppressed groups within the u.s., particularly to prisoners—and including me. You all have been genuine comrades and I recognize and regard you as such. But, you cannot deny—in fact you've *often* complained to me—that these groups and their memberships have remained small in number. Also, as a principle, they reject the role and responsibilities of leadership, although by working to influence the ideas and actions of prisoners through the literature and line they spread, they are in fact acting as leaders. Thus they leave those they “lead” without the needed guidance and organization to apply those ideas and change their oppressed condition. I talk about this a bit in a recent article: “Unity-Struggle-Transformation: On Revolutionary Organization, Leadership and Cadre Development.”

A Moribund and Marginalized Method?

Other reasons I promote the MLM party model...well, because it works, it is infinitely adaptable, and it is the most effective model of political leadership in mass-based revolutionary movements. Even the imperialists admit this. It can't be so “moribund” and “marginalized” as you allege since a Maoist movement just a couple of years ago toppled the oppressive monarchy in Nepal. A Maoist people's war presently controls most of rural India, and Maoists are giving the neo-colonial puppet governments of the Philippines and Peru nightmares. And let's not forget that despite Colombia being the hemisphere's

foreign military occupation, whereas the others direct their violence only at their compatriots. Double standards and hypocrisy—can we expect anything else from the imperialists?”

Akin to Hamas is another modern Middle East organization, just mentioned, that single-handedly repelled a pretty vicious ‘israeli’ invasion of southern Lebanon in 2006. Namely, Hizbollah. It too has an organizational structure similar to the model you reject as moribund and marginalized. Hizbollah has, in fact, proven almost impossible to penetrate and monitor, yet it too has won broad popular support and sunk deep roots within Lebanese civil society.

Hizbollah also has a politburo that interfaces with an Executive Council which mirrors a central committee. The Executive Council members preside over specific social and civil functions like civil defense, health care, regional offices, education, labor unions, etc. Even the commander of Hizbollah’s resistance fighters is elected to his position. But because it combines both a military and political structure, the organization is a bit more centralized in its decision-making than Hamas. However, instead of a general chairman, the group is presided over by a seven-member consultative council, which does have a chairman. There is then a special security branch that reliably protects the leadership and acts as security via liaison committees in Hizbollah base areas.

Although concentrated along israel’s northern border, Hizbollah kept such a low profile that ‘israel’ believed it could successfully invade southern Lebanon and seize valuable territory and waterways it had been plotting on for decades. In the summer of 2006, the ‘israeli’ army invaded, and was swiftly corrected by Hizbollah and made to retreat empty-handed back into ‘israel.’

Because Hamas and Hizbollah generally trail behind mass spontaneity, and represent patriarchal and bourgeois class interests, they do not unify and raise the consciousness of the masses above immediate needs, nor empower them through class struggle to seize power from their class enemies and imperialist domination. This distinguishes them from an MLM party. Moreover, their mass bases have forced them to

which resided in an elders’ council that spoke through a head elder. This council was composed of respected elders who presided over various traditional social and civil functions in the village. The head elder was appointed and could be removed or replaced by vote. Many people confuse the terms *chief* and *head elder*, or think they denote the same type of leadership, which I should distinguish. Unlike the head elder, the chief rules over a patriarchal clan society, he inherits his position by heredity (instead of by vote), and he can only be deposed by defeat in war. Many Maroon societies were also ruled by such chiefs. The chief also had command over a specialized body of warriors. Unlike the chief, the head elder had no power to force her/his will on the village because s/he had no special army or police. Instead, a decision announced by her/him had greater force (moral authority) because it was actually the decision reached by collective agreement of the village’s most respected members (the elders’ council), with participation and input from the society as a whole.

Once a decision was reached by the council in a dispute, or in selecting a head elder, or other matters, it was binding on everyone, including those who disagreed with it. Those who bucked the social will were also taken before the village council and masses if the offense were serious enough. If found guilty in the mass hearing they were punished accordingly, which could include banishment from the village. This is in essence DC. In fact it is duplicated almost exactly in the model of organization and decision-making used by the MLM party, which I’ll demonstrate momentarily.

But first I’d like to give actual examples of such centralized authority (a vanguard) in the communal Afrikan village and how they applied internal popular democracy, or what many MLM’ists call “self-criticism.” Ojinga Odinga described the head elders’ role in his pre-colonial Luo village in Kenya:

“A [head elder] did not issue orders, he sounded out the elders, met them in consultation and when he said ‘this is my decision,’ he was announcing not his personal verdict but an agreed upon point of view. His function was not to lay down the law, but to consult and arbitrate to learn the consensus of opinion

and to keep unity of his people. Elders were men of substance and integrity, and recognized as outstanding individuals. Even when they came from leading lineages they did not inherit leadership but had to earn it...

Frantz Fanon described the internal public democracy practiced by Afrikan societies as “tradition,” a process used by MLM parties, which communists call criticism and self-criticism. He furthermore observed that this practice counteracts the anti-communal mental habits of the western intellectual types:

“Self-criticism has been much talked about of late, but few people realize that it is an African institution. Whether in the djeemas of North Africa or in the meetings of Western Africa, tradition demands that the quarrels which occur in a village should be settled in public. It is a communal self-criticism, of course, and with a note of humor, because everybody is relaxed, and because in the last resort we all want the same things. But the more the intellectual imbibes the atmosphere of the people, the more completely he abandons the habits of calculation, of unwonted silence, of mental reservations, and shakes off the spirit of concealment. And it is true that already at that level we can say that the community triumphs, and that it spreads its own light and its own reason.”

So we see a centralized leadership structure, a vanguard, in Afrikan communal society, and the combination of public democracy and centralized enforcement of the collective will in their decision making and dispute resolution processes. But these are concepts rejected by anti-authoritarians because they don’t really understand them. Just as they don’t understand, or otherwise tend to stereotype, or idealize, many things, due to failing to objectively search out and draw truth from facts instead of opinions, or responding to the oppressive system with emotion rather than reason.

Now allow me to show you the parallels between the DC of communal societies as described above and that of the genuine MLM parties, by quoting none other than Mao himself critically explaining DC to his own party comrades, who failed to grasp and apply what he called “unity of the leadership and the masses,” or simply the “mass line method”:

disciplined and organized—and therefore most feared—Palestinian organization. While I don’t suppose it has changed drastically since 2004, I’m most familiar with the structure Hamas had under its founder Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, who was assassinated that same year by the ‘israeli’ military.

Hamas relied on group leadership and consensus decision-making, with Yasin as the spokesman or chairman. Although he did have plenary power to make unilateral decisions, he seldom exercised it. To make collective decisions reflecting the popular will under the extreme conditions of military occupation, the organization would circulate written policy options among activists for discussion and decision, who would then give their feedback to “knowledgeable people in [their] area.” This way the group could “make a decision acceptable to the widest possible base of our ranks which, at the same time, would preserve the movement’s achievements and remain faithful to its goals and principles.”

As already mentioned, like a communist party, Hamas has a politburo. But having some of the same organizational features of an MLM party doesn’t make Hamas the equivalent of one. In fact not only is Hamas not specifically a working-class group, it isn’t opposed to capitalism. No Islamist group is, despite the formal rejection of secular politics by many of them. As I noted, most of Hamas’s funding came from capitalist Arab states, organizations, and individuals. Indeed, Islamism, or “Political Islam,” has been used by the u.s. as an agent of imperialist expansion and intervention in the Middle East. As Samir Amin observed:

“We should not be surprised that the U.S. is pleased by the services that Political Islam renders to its project of world hegemony. With the exception of Hamas in Palestine and Hizbollah in Lebanon (pre-9/11), no movement of Political Islam is designated as an enemy by Washington. The pre-9/11 designation of Hamas and Hizbollah as ‘terrorist organizations’ was clearly an accident of political geography, since both are opposed to the state of Israel, which evidently takes precedence in U.S. considerations over everything else. Hamas and Hizbollah are the only manifestations of Political Islam fighting

most of its funding from. It also has a leadership branch within 'israeli' prisons, where more than 10,000 Palestinian resistance leaders are confined. Therefore Hamas remained free of pressures and influences of outside forces, and was always able to keep informed of the needs, interests, and desires of the Palestinian people.

It was the will of the Palestinian people that made Hamas their national liberation organization and moved Hamas's military arm to take up arms against 'israel' and its illegal settlements that has been mass murdering Palestinians—especially children—and increasingly stealing their land. It was the Palestinian will that moved Hamas to set up social support programs to help provide for basic needs like food, medical care, etc. that 'israel' is blocking. And it was the Palestinian will that elected Hamas in 2006 as their national political leadership in place of the PA despite knowing the u.s. and 'israel' would retaliate by cutting all funding they were giving to prop up the neo-colonial PA, and crumbs they were tossing to the already ruined Gaza economy. So Hamas is a reflection of Palestinian spontaneity. But remaining confined to Gaza with its mass base, it evolved to reflect their developing political consciousness in response to desperately oppressive conditions, and a thriving culture based in keeping alive the Palestinian historical memory—something that New Afrikans have been robbed of because we do not have a vanguard party to keep alive and unite us around our own collective historical experiences, struggles, and consciousness. We are therefore like a people suffering historical amnesia or Alzheimer's.

So here again we see the confirmed role and need of organized leadership, to unite an oppressed people around a collective identity, consciousness, and resistance, even without revolution being the organization's explicit aim.

And in case you didn't realize, Hamas has—or at least it had—an organizational structure similar to an ML party's. They practice DC, although with less open mass participation and publicity due to their operating under 'israeli' military occupation. And as noted they are mass-based and generally responsive to the will of the people. Its organizational structure has always distinguished Hamas as the most

"It seems that some of our comrades still do not understand the democratic centralism which Marx and Lenin talked of...They are afraid of the masses, afraid of the masses talking about them, afraid of the masses criticizing them. What sense does it make for Marxist-Leninists to be afraid of the masses? When they have made mistakes they don't talk about themselves, and they are afraid of the masses talking about them. The more frightened they are, the more haunted they become. I think one should not be afraid. What is there to be afraid of? Our attitude is to hold fast to the truth and be ready at any time to correct our mistakes. The question of right or wrong, correct or incorrect in our work has to do with contradictions among the people. To resolve contradictions among the people we can't use curses or fists, still less guns or knives. We can only use the method of discussion, reasoning, criticism, and self-criticism. In short, we can only use democratic methods, the method of letting the masses speak out.

"Both inside and outside the Party there must be a full democratic life, which means conscientiously putting democratic centralism into effect. We must conscientiously bring questions out into the open, and let the masses speak out. Even at the risk of being cursed we should still let them speak out. The result of their curses at the worst will be that we are thrown out and cannot go on doing this kind of work—demoted or transferred. What is so impossible about that? Why should a person go up and never go down? Why should one only work in one place and never be transferred to another? I think that demotion and transfer, whether it is justified or not, does good to people. They thereby strengthen their revolutionary will, are able to investigate and study a variety of new conditions and increase their useful knowledge. I myself have had experience in this respect and gained a great deal of benefit."

Having thus explained that party democracy is a process of decision-making that compels openness, and draws upon and implements the collective will of party cadre and the masses, Mao went on to explain party centralism as all party cadre being bound by the decisions reached collectively through the democratic process, just like in the communal village.

Furthermore, the MLM party's central committee (CC) is organized horizontally much like the elders' council. Like the council, the CC

consists of elected group members who preside over specifically defined social and civil functions (ministries). As you're aware I preside over the Defense Ministry of our NABPP-PC. The democratically elected chair-person or secretary corresponds to the head elder. The party's general membership is drawn from the proletarian class of the people it leads and represents, or its members must have developed the proletarian class stand and integrated themselves with the people. Leadership positions are democratically bestowed, based upon proven ability and commitment, and are subject to revocation by vote. Party leaders and their practices are to be openly scrutinized by party members *and the masses* it proposes to lead. There is thus "unity of the leadership and the masses" in purpose and practice, just as the bourgeoisie and their parties are linked together. Indeed the party is directly connected to the masses by party organs and mass organizations, just like the CNS is connected to the body's organs and muscles by the peripheral nervous system.

It's a Class Struggle

As I've noted, a vanguard becomes problematic when it represents and pursues the interests of those other than it leads. What recommends the MLM party is its ideological orientation to countering such subversion. It first of all emphasizes its proletarian orientation, and recognizes that so long as there is class society and class struggle (which continues even under socialism), there is always and in all places going to be struggle for domination between the classes. In capitalist societies where the bourgeoisie rules, its values and its own vanguard dominate the society, economy, culture, and institutions. And it will maneuver and strive ceaselessly to prevent the development and rise of a genuine vanguard of the proletariat, subjecting the masses to the rule and influences of its own vanguard. In socialist societies where the proletariat is in power, the overthrown bourgeoisie will struggle at every turn to subvert the proletarian party and state, and to regain power. This is what class struggle means. It is because many don't understand class struggle,

This last point answers the comrade's point about betrayals of the masses. Again, any group that does this is not a mass-based vanguard, or it has been subverted, which is what happens when you *don't* struggle against, purge, and/or ultimately split from subversive influences and elements to maintain the health and class integrity of the party.

Speaking admirably of Hamas

Speaking of a party's remaining true to its base, this brings me to Hamas. Yes, I've spoken admiringly of Hamas on this very basis. Which is not to say that I agree with their politics or tactics per se. Hamas, as you pointed out, is not a working-class party. Actually, it wasn't initially a Palestinian national liberation group either. In fact Hamas began as an Islamist organization that clashed not only with the 'israeli' occupation forces, but with secular nationalists and communists as well. It actually rejected the concept of Palestinian nationalism, promoting instead an abstract Islamic theocracy. Secular politics were left to other groups like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—later becoming co-opted by the u.s. and 'israel' and changing its name to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Hamas's focus was instead on spreading its Islamist ideology and responding to the immediate needs of the Palestinian people, particularly their physical need of basic services, and psychological need to resist 'israel's' brutal and racist military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.

Hamas *became* a political structure because the Palestinian people made it that, choosing Hamas over the corrupt PLO that outright sold out their struggle for national liberation by signing the Oslo agreement with 'israel' in 1993. The people put their might behind Hamas, electing its functionaries into positions of local leadership, then ultimately as their overall national leadership. To its credit, Hamas's leadership and membership always remained indigenous to its operational bases in Gaza. Only members of its political bureau lived in exile and thereby interfaced with other Arab states and regional actors, where Hamas got

regarding Comrade Maroon's article. The Maroon societies which he promotes as model revolutionary organizations never attempted to nor were capable of overthrowing the slave system—a system much weaker and less organized than today's imperialist one. Furthermore, they co-existed with the slave system, fed off it, and many became its agents and slave catchers, and were often manipulated into fighting each other by the planters.

The Maroons were not revolutionaries but rebels who merely fled and defied the slave societies, but left them intact to oppress others. So in relation to the masses of slaves left behind, one could say the Maroons had a legacy of betrayal of the oppressed masses, sterile practice, and of being factionalized among themselves. Exactly like the hydra that comrade Maroon uses to symbolize the rebel Maroon societies, they amounted to a common class of oppressed peoples but composed of many contending heads, unorganized, uncoordinated, often bickering, fighting, and contending with each other, and thus unable to lead the collective body in struggle to defeat the common enemy. A task which the one-headed dragon—the MLM party—once awakened, has proven eminently capable of leading its collective body in achieving. Consider also, how easily the European imperialist powers overran Afrika's separate village societies, instituting colonialism across the entire continent, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, exactly *because* those societies lacked a unifying leadership. Yet, Comrade Maroon promotes such localized forms of social organization as *models of resistance* against today's even more advanced imperialism?! Then contrast this with the fact that the *only* time a society of many separate communal villages held their own and ultimately defeated imperialist forces was when they were united, organized and coordinated by an ML or MLM party: the Chinese defeated multiple imperialist powers under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the Vietnamese defeated the French in 1954 and then the u.s. in the Vietnam War under the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party, etc.

It also speaks volumes that the only slave uprising that actually overthrew a slave system, was organized under a conscious class leadership, albeit that of an aspiring bourgeois one (the Haitian Revolution, 1791–1803).

that they've witnessed reversals of socialist gains, the overthrow of socialist parties and states and their reversion to capitalist systems, and splits and struggles within revolutionary parties, yet failed to recognize these were the product of ongoing struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. What we Communists call the “two line struggle.” Therefore, any aspiring revolutionary vanguard must be conscious to resist being infected, influenced, and infiltrated by the class values of the enemy. This means the party must be uncompromisingly committed to the working class. It is impossible to prevent elements that share, harbor, or develop enemy class values from creeping into or cropping up within a revolutionary party. This is why Lenin promoted splits as the health of the party and Mao promoted cultural revolutions arousing the masses to rise up against bourgeois influence and elements within the revolutionary party and state.

Attempts to maintain unprincipled unity between genuine revolutionaries and bourgeois elements within such parties have led time and again to their being subverted by counter-revolutionaries, such as occurred in Afrika—in the African National Congress when Winnie Mandela was purged and Chris Hani assassinated in the early 1990s and power was ‘given’ to capitalist turncoat Nelson Mandela; in the PAIGC when Amilcar Cabral was assassinated in 1972 and his brother Luis was purged, and so on.

Answer to Comrade “Maroon”

There was an article written a few years ago by Comrade Russell “Maroon” Shoatz, called “The Dragon and the Hydra,” which was a response to my own earlier article on the role and need of vanguard parties. In that article Comrade Maroon leveled charges against ML parties, claiming they have a legacy of internal factionalism, sterile practice, and betraying the very people they are supposed to lead in struggle against oppression. Since these charges are relevant to this discussion, and I haven't had the opportunity to finish my formal reply,

I want to briefly respond here.

I've just answered the point on factionalism, to which I might add that Maroon's article completely overlooks the role of class in revolutionary struggle; and even proposed that anarchists, anti-authoritarians and proponents of ultra-democratic movements, share organizational concepts with the Maroon societies that had elders and chiefs and were *in no form* ultra-democratic or decentralized. But to further illustrate my point, imagine that several committed conscious prisoners came together to form a leadership group to educate and unite others to struggle against the administration and guards' abuses. So they develop a solid line of theory and tactics to achieve this end. And it meets with initial success in winning over and organizing other prisoners. This group answers to and is committed to its prisoner base and grows as they educate more prisoners into their class line.

As soon as the pigs see their authority and monopoly on influence and power challenged, they're going to try and repress the leadership group in various ways, including by trying to 'turn' its supporters and members, using both the carrot and the stick. Inevitably you're going to have some driven by their own power agendas, pig inducements, or other motives to become agents, infiltrators, and turncoats. These subversives will maneuver to increase and consolidate their influence and numbers, and to subvert and sabotage the gains and goals of the genuinely committed cadre. So what do you do? Do you go along with them? Do you maintain an unprincipled unity with them inside your organization or movement where they are privy to your plans, identities, etc. enabling them to subvert the entire group and movement? Of course not! What you do is expose them and distinguish yourself and your position from them before the people. If they are enemy agents you 'correct' them, if they are not but persist in their reactionary aims you purge them from your ranks (if their numbers are not so great), or (if their numbers are substantial) you and the serious cadre split off from them into a separate organization. This is all done within the structure of democratic centralism of course and distinguishing your commitment to the masses from their opportunism, self-interest, or reactionary politics.

This isn't mere factionalism. It is part of the *class struggle*. Part of the struggle to keep the people's vanguard loyal to the class it represents and not subverted by the enemy of that class. That's how the enemy controls us right now. Using Judases who look, talk and/or act like us, but who really aspire toward and serve them, or have other ulterior interests at heart. To counter this, only the MLM party specifically and explicitly adheres to the ideological and political lines of the proletariat *and no other*.

As Lenin observed, Marx warned that when communists unite with others in struggle, "they enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but *do not allow any bargaining over principles, do not make theoretical 'concessions.'*" In other words, while we may compromise and adapt our tactics to align ourselves with allies, we must never compromise our class stand. Our commitment is to the ideological and political line of the revolutionary proletariat and no other. This is why Mao emphasized that political and ideological line determines everything, particularly the success or failure of revolutionary struggle. The moment we allow influences of the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, lumpen, and other less than revolutionary sectors to seep in and sway us, we betray the working class. Not adhering to the proletarian class line as Marx cautioned, is how many revolutionaries have been turned from the course of revolutionary class struggle to one of reaction.

As for 'sterile' practice. This critique doesn't apply to genuine MLM elements, because as with the elders' councils, a vanguard isn't a vanguard simply because it calls itself one, or because it forces its leadership on the people. It becomes a vanguard because a substantial part of the people *voluntarily accept* and follow its leadership, which it earns through correct analysis, practice, and example. If it ain't doing nothing and the people don't recognize it, it ain't *their* vanguard. Like with the NABPP-PC. We aren't a New Afrikan vanguard yet, only the nucleus of one. But we definitely aspire to this.

So you see this is complicated.

Before turning to the next issue, I should make a few final points